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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that surveys dealing with the incidence of crime among the elderly do not take into account the varying individual and group levels of fear and exposure to threat of victimization. Data from Law Enforcement Assistance Administration surveys were used to review the personal victimization of older persons, incorporating the generally neglected category of series victimizations, i.e., a number of similar victimizations during a 6-month period. Analysis showed that while personal series victimizations of the elderly were relatively rare, failure to deal adequately with them resulted in an underestimation of the prevalence of victimization among older persons. A conservative re-estimate increased the frequency by about 10%. Results also showed that the poor were frequent victims and that attempted assaults were most likely to be classified as series events. The findings suggest that further analysis of series incidents is needed to understand their importance in the examination of victimization of the elderly. (JAC)

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ELDERLY MULTIPLE VICTIMS: MORE FREQUENT THAN COMMONLY THOUGHT?

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There are few variables examined in social science research which show as significant an inverse correlation as do age and incidence of criminal victimization in the general population. Several analyses of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration's National Crime Panel victim surveys for the years 1972 through 1977 have verified the finding that the elderly as a group are the least victimized by crimes of all age groups in American society (Cook, 1976; Hindelang, 1976; Liang & Sengstock, 1981). Nevertheless, the belief that older Americans are uniquely susceptible to criminal victimization persists in many circles. Several reasons for this disparity between a set of statistical "facts" and perception can be proposed. Those who view the problem of crime against the elderly in terms of a "crisis" orientation often base their analysis less on total population statistics and more on their sense of outrage that any number of older persons, no matter how small, are victimized at all in what should be their protected and peaceful senior years (Geis, 1977). Others point to the relatively greater negative effects of criminal victimization on older persons due to their lower capacity to withstand physical harm and/or financial loss (Cook, 1976). Still others suggest that general LEAA data obscure significant and policy-relevant variations in victimization rates among subgroups of the elderly (Liang & Sengstock, 1981) and across various types of crimes committed against older persons (Conklin, 1976; Antunes et al, 1977; Goldsmith & Goldsmith, 1975).

A more general and conceptually-based criticism of victimization rates and estimates of probabilities based on national survey data, such as that of the LEAA, is offered by Stephen Balkin (1979). Balkin suggests that these

surveys, as do all "objective" indices of crime, fail to measure the real rate, likelihood or risk of victimization since they do not take into account varying individual and group levels of fear of crime and exposure to threat of victimization. Thus, for those persons or groups (such as the elderly), whose fear of crime has resulted in a self-induced reduction in exposure to risk (i.e. time on the streets), the measured rate, as in victimization surveys, may more significantly reflect this reduction in exposure and not the true (potential) likelihood of victimization. In Balkin's proposal, the "contradictory" relationship betwen high levels of fear of crime and low victimization rates in the elderly would be resolved when controlling for the intervening variable, exposure to threat. Implicit in Balkin's thesis is the concommitant idea that this fear of crime and resulting circumscribed life style in the elderly are, in fact, additional forms of victimization.

There is a more significant reason for the reluctance of some to accept an analysis of victimization of the elderly based on national LEAA data which has serious implications for policy making. This factor is the presence of several methodological problems and inadequacies within the design of the surveys. The failure of the LEAA surveys to measure certain categories of criminal victimizations particularly salient to the elderly has been addressed:

> While national data show most of the kinds of crimes committed against the older victim, they ignore one prevalent and apparently profitable crime--the con game. National studies of fraud and confidence games are not available, but the State of California conducted extensive investigations that indicate the older person is a prime target for the con artist. (National Council on the Aging, 1978)

The Council cites the findings of the California study that 90% of "bunco" victims are over 65 and most are women; 7 out of every 10 cases of medical fraud reported were against older people; and almost twice as much money was lost by older people through 2 types of con games in one 6 month period as was lost by banks through robberies. It should also be noted that the most serious of all criminal victimizations, incidences of homicide, are not measured in any victimization survey. Of the total number of murders known to police nation-wide in 1975 (18,642) 1,818 involved victims 60 years and over. Known homicides of persons 60 and over increased from 8.3% of the total number of homicides (8,773) in 1965 to 9.5% of the total number (18,632) in 1975 (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1975). In Detroit, the number of murders of older persons as a percentage of the total number of homicides in that city, increased from 9.4% in 1971 to 13% in 1973 (National Council on the Aging, 1978).

Additional problems surround the measurement of the categories of criminal victimization which are included within the LEAA surveys. This paper is an overview of several of these problematic areas in the LEAA National Household Victim Surveys as they relate to the analysis of single and multiple victimization of the elderly and a more specific analysis of personal victimization of older persons, incorporating the, heretofore, generally neglected category of "series victimizations".

The NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

The LEAA Household Survey is one of four on-going victimization surveys which have been conducted by the Census Bureau beginning in 1972 and continuing up to the present time. It is a national, multi-stage probability sample of approximately 60,000 households in all 50 states and the District

of Columbia. Data on household characteristics and household victimizations are obtained from a "household informant" -- any competent resident 18 years or older. A Personal Incident Report is completed for every household member reporting a victimization experienced within the previous 6 month period, including information on the type, time and place of the crime, characteristics of the offender(s) and injury and/or loss sustained by the victim.

The total sample is divided into 6 subsamples (panels) of 10,000 housing units. To lessen the possibility of decreased respondent cooperation and biased responses associated with repetitive interviewing of the same households, a rotational panel model is used in which one subsample of 10,000 housing units is continually rotated out of the total sample every six months and replaced by a new panel, with each unit potentially remaining in the sample for a total of three years. The continuity of the sample is, therefore, not that of households or persons but of housing units or addresses.

Interviews are "bounded" by the six month reference period through a procedure in which events reported by the respondents in each interview (after the initial one) are checked to see if these same events were reported in the previous interview. Identical events re-reported are deleted from the tabulation. Initial interviews are used solely for bounding purposes.

Although recognized as an improvement in some respects over estimates of criminal activity based on police department statistics, the LEAA victim surveys carry with them their own unique limitations and problems. As with all restrospective studies, questions concerning the accuracy of the events reported are paramount and include the problems of recall and "telescoping".

Underreporting of victimizations is possible due to simple memory failure or deliberate withholding of information on the part of respondents. The use of the Screen Questionnaire as a "memory jogging" device is an attempt to lessen the former. The degree to which memory loss in the older respondent may affect survey data is difficult to identify. A "reverse record check" of known victims in three London boroughs suggests that "simple memory failure [operated] in a more or less random fashion across respondents" (Sparks, et al, 1977). It should be noted, however, that the proportion of respondents aged 61 and over who did not report victimizations previously recorded by the police was twice as high as the sample as a whole in this study.

Selective reporting of remembered events can also affect the accuracy of survey data. Questions have been raised, for example, concerning the degree of non-reporting of victimizations committed by persons known to the victim. A Census Bureau pilot study, in which self-reports of known victims in San Jose, Texas were checked with police records, indicates that violent crimes involving relatives were reported only 22% of the time and victimizations by persons known but unrelated to the victim were reported 58% of the time compared to a 75% reporting rate for crimes involving strangers (National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, 1972). A related question is whether the LEAA's questionnaire adequately addresses domestic or inter-kin victimizations--do the respondents subjectively define such acts as child, spouse or elder abuse as crimes when addressed in survey terminology?

"Telescoping" of events by the respondents can also bias survey estimates of victimizations: inflating estimates in forward telescoping--respondents reporting events as happening within the reference period when,

in fact, they happened earlier; deflating time in backward telescoping--respondents remembering events as occurring before the time frame when, in fact, they occurred during the period in question. The 6 month reference period has been chosen by the LEAA as the optimum reference period for accurate placement of events in time and the bounding procedure of checking for re-reporting of identical victimizations is an attempt to control for forward telescoping. In their evaluation of the LEAA surveys, the National Research Council (1976) summarizes their conclusions regarding the effects of telescoping and recall on survey data:

> On the basis of the pretest evidence alone, we would draw the following inferences: (1) Both forward and backward telescoping occur in the reporting of victimizations, but the net effect appears to be in a forward dirction; (2) as in the case of memory decay, telescoping varies by kind of victimization; (3) telescoping and memory decay bias comparisons of estimates based on different reference periods, whether bounded or unbounded; and (4) the interaction of telescoping and memory decay has an unknown effect on victimization rates.

There is an additional "unknown effect" related to the bounding of interviews to the 6-month reference period, subsequent reinterviewing of the same respondents, and multiple victimization rates. The Census Bureau has estimated that for adjacent 6 month intervals in any one year, 86% of the housing units surveyed have the same occupants and 95% of these are reinterviewed at least once. They note further that unbounded interviews show a victimization rate about 35% higher than that of bounded (National Research Council, 1976). The question of how many of these reinterviewed respondents are reporting repeated victimizations over a 12 month period which are presently being recorded as single victimizations within a 6 month period is unanswered.

Finally, the accuracy of both single and multiple victimization rates based on LEAA survey data has been questioned due to the manner in which "series victimizations" are handled within the survey. The following section will address this issue.

SERIES VICTIMIZATIONS

Within the LEAA National Household Survey, a series incident report is completed for every household member who reports having experienced a number of similar victimizations during the previous 6 month period, the exact details of which he/she is unable to supply. Three conditions must be met for a series report to be filed:

1) The incidents must be very similar in detail.

2) There must be at least three incidents in a series.

3) The respondent must not be able to recall dates and other details well enough to report them separately.

Depending upon the number of repeated victimizations involved, a series report can represent "three to four", "five to ten", or "eleven or more" separate incidents. Details of only the most recent event are recorded for each series report; these details are the same as those gathered for discrete incidents.

The LEAA currently eliminates series victimizations from their incident count and due to the incompleteness and ambiguous nature of series data, they are typically absent from analyses based on LEAA Surveys. Estimates of the rate of series victimizations in the general population vary. The National Research Council (1976), looking at 1973 NCS data, estimates that 20% to 30% of reported victimizations in that year were treated as series. They indicate further that each personal series report accounted, on the average, for 6 and 7 victimizations and that the rate of victimization by simple assault would

increase by over 75%, and aggravated assault by as much as 70%, if series incidents were included in the tabulations.

Hindelang, et al (1978), in their analysis of the LEAA Central Cities Survey for the years 1972-1974, report that "only one-half of 1 percent" of this sample reported one or more personal series incidents. This compares to seven-tenths of 1 percent reporting two or more non-series personal victimizations, 4.8% reporting one victimization, and 94% reporting no victimization. It should be noted that in this study each series report is counted as one incident, when in fact, it represents at least 3 victimizations. Even when counting series incidents in this manner, the authors found that the rate of multiple victimization in the general population, when measured either as multiple non-series victimization or as series victimization, exceeds that expected in a Poisson distribution.

The National Research Council (1976), in a review of the methodology of the LEAA Surveys, has been critical of the manner in which series victimizations are addressed within the surveys and in analyses of data. They see the series victimization data, problematic as it is, as an important source of information regarding multiple victimization, with implications for both single and multiple victimization rates and estimates of risk based on those rates. The Council has suggested preliminary, descriptive investigations into the nature of series victimizations as a first step toward improving the LEAA National Household Survey.

PERSONAL SERIES VICTIMIZATION AND THE AGED

Of the 1,778 personal crimes which were reported by victims 60 years of age and older for the years 1973 through 1977, 58 were series incidents

(see Table I). Nearly two-thirds (64; n=37) of the series reports involved three to four incidents, 27% (n=15) described series of five to ten incidents and 9% (n=5) of the reports were of 11 or more incidents. To obtain a conservative estimate of the number of additional incidents of victimization which these series reports represent, we multiplied the number of cases for each category by the lowest possible number of incidents within each category and subtracted the 58 incidents which were described in the survey (as discrete incidents). Thus, the 58 reports of series incidents represent at least 183 additional occurrences of personal victimization suffered by the elderly.

In turning to a discussion of the demographic characteristics of the older victims of series incidents (see Table II), we find that 77% of them were white (n=43) while 25% were black or other races (n=13). If we compare these figures to those found among single and multiple personal crime victims 60 years or older, we find that a slightly larger percentage of series incident victims were non-white (23% versus 17.1% for single and 17.7% for multiple). In looking at the sex distribution of series personal incident victims as compared to that found among those reporting single and multiple discrete victimization, a greater dissimilarity is seen. Males and females were represented approximately equally among those reporting both single and multiple incidents, with a very slight increase of males in the multiple victims. However, males were nearly twice as likely to be found among those experiencing series victimizations (64.4% male versus 35.6% female. Little difference between older respondents reporting series, single, and multiple victimizations was found in terms of marital status, although

a larger percentage of series victims were divorced (14.5%) than those reporting single (6.8%) or multiple (8.7%) incidents.

Hence we find that series victims are more likely than single or multiple victims to be males, divorced, or of minority races. It has already been noted (Sengstock and Liang, 1980) that multiple victims also exhibit these same characteristics to a greater degree than single victims. We suggest, therefore, that series victimization appears to be an intensified form of multiple victimization, with series victims exhibiting the characteristics of multiple victims, but to a slightly greater degree. In turn, multiple victims appear to exhibit the characteristics of single victims to a greater degree. It is likely that persons who have certain activity levels and styles of life have greater exposure to risk and are more prone to victimization. (Balkan, 1979; Sengstock and Liang, 1980). Hence, such persons would exhibit even greater likelihood to become victims a second or third time (multiple victims), or to be victimized with such frequency that the details of each discrete incident become vague (series victims).

In general, the pattern of criminal victimization is fairly consistent among all age groups, with a larger proportion of victims being 60 to 64 years old and the percentage of victims decreasing as the age category increases. It should be noted, however, that a slight departure from this pattern occurs among series victims, with 15% of all personal series victims being 80 years of age or older. Several reasons for this pattern might be cited. It might be an artifact of the data collection process: separate reports may not be collected on the several incidents as a result either of poor recall on the part of the "very old" respondent, or of interviewers' impatience with very aged persons. It is also possible that those who

were 80 years or older were relatively active individuals for their age, increasing their exposure to criminal activity. A further possibility is that persons of this age might be so obviously vulnerable that they are seen as easy prey by offenders.

In terms of the victim's community size, a few differing patterns emerge (see Table IIA). While victims of series incidents were most likely to be residents of communities with populations from 50,000 to 99,999 (21.8%), victims of single offenses most often resided in communities with 1,000,000 or more inhabitants (25.0%) and those reporting multiple discrete victimizations in communities with 100,000 to 249,999 residents. As Sengstock and Liang (1980) noted for single and multiple incidents, these figures should be viewed with caution due to small cell sizes.

A consistent pattern relating to income level is found among all three victim types: those who are poor (with annual incomes of less than $5,000) are most likely to become victims of criminal activity. Further, those with only a grade school education account for almost half of the victims in all three groups.

Perhaps the most interesting finding concerning series victimizations of the elderly is the type of crime they represent. As seen in Table III, 36 of the 58 series reports involved attempted assaults (as defined by details of the most recent event). If one assumes that the similarity of the incidents within the series reports relates to the crime category, attempted assaults would represent 209 of the total 223 series victimizations and 88% of all personal series victimizations among those age 60 and over.

Purse snatching and pocket picking, crimes which are often thought to be the most prevalent in victimization of this age group, were reported by only 3 (or 5.8%) of the victims and (assuming similarity of crime category throughout the incidents in the series) represent 13 of the total series incidents. It is perhaps not surprising that assaults represent the type of crime most likely to be classified as series events rather than multiple discrete incidents. One can imagine that an aged person might be most distressed at the prospect of recalling the circumstances of such a direct personal attack and that an interviewer might be reluctant to press the issue. However, this means that series incidents represent a greater number of serious crimes (assault) rather than minor ones (larceny). Consequently, the failure to consider series incidents in studies of elderly victimization results in considerable underestimation of the seriousness of the crimes committed against aged persons.

Summary

It is apparent that personal series victimization of the elderly are a relatively rare phenomenon. At the same time, we have shown that the failure to deal adequately with series victimization of the elderly results in an underestimation of the prevalence of personal victimization among older persons. Our conservative re-estimate of the frequency of personal victimization among this age group increases by approximately 10% when the 183 discrete series incidents are combined with those defined as single incidents.

Our analysis of personal series incidents has further intensified

TABLE I

Number of Incidents in Series

	Frequency	Percentage
3 to 4	36	64.28
5 to 10	15	26.78
11 or more	6	8.9

conclusions which have been made previously concerning the characteristics of single and multiple elderly victims. Those who are males, single and of low socioeconomic status tend to be victimized with greater frequency than others of their age group. We have also found, however, a striking dissimilarity between single and multiple victims and those who suffered from series incidents; most series are more severe in nature as exhibited by the high percentage of assaults which were reported.

Further analysis of series incidents reported by older persons is needed to understand their relative importance in the analysis of victimization of the elderly. An extension of this paper will include property series victimizations of older persons and an examination of the implication of series victimizations (and their absence in incident counts) for rates of victimization of the elderly and estimates of risk.

TABLE II

TYPE OF VICTIMIZATION OF THE ELDERLY BY SELECTED INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Series Incidents	Number of Incidents in Series				Single Incidents		Multiple Incidents	
Victim Characteristics	All Series	3-4	5-10	11 or more				
Race (N=56)								
White	(43) 77.0%	(28) 77.3%	(12) 80.6%	(3) 65.1%	Race: White	(1129) 82.8%	(56) 82.4%	
Black	(12) 20.9	(7) 19.5	(3) 19.4	(2) 34.9	Black	(220) 16.1	(11) 16.2	
Other	(1) 2.1	(1) 3.2	(0) 0.0	(0) 0.0	Other	(14) 1.1	(1) 1.5	
Sex (N=56)								
Male	(36) 64.4%	(28) 76.5%	(7) 48.5%	(1) 24.5%	Sex: Male	(668) 49.0%	(37) 53.6%	
Female	(20) 35.6	(9) 23.5	(7) 51.5	(4) 75.5	Female	(696) 51.0	(32) 46.4	
Age Group (N=56)					Age Group:			
60-64	(21) 36.7%	(12) 33.2%	(9) 58.5%	(0) 00.0%	60-64	(448) 32.9%	(32) 45.1%	
65-69	(18) 31.9	(13) 34.8	(1) 8.6	(4) 75.6	65-69	(369) 27.1	(21) 29.6	
70-74	(6) 11.8	(5) 14.8	(1) 8.1	(0) 0.0	70-74	(232) 17.0	(13) 18.3	
75-79	(3) 4.6	(3) 7.0	(0) 0.0	(0) 0.0	75-79	(162) 11.9	(4) 5.6	
80 or older	(8) 15.0	(4) 10.0	(1) 24.5	(1) 24.5	80 +	(152) 11.3	(1) 1.4	
Marital Status (N=56)					Marital Status:			
Married	(36) 55.2%	(24) 65.1%	(6) 41.6%	(1) 24.5	Married	(657) 48.2%	(39) 56.5%	
Widowed	(13) 22.7	(7) 18.9	(6) 40.7	(0) 0.0	Widowed	(453) 33.2	(16) 23.2	
Divorced	(8) 14.5	(3) 9.4	(3) 17.7	(2) 40.7	Divorced	(92) 6.8	(6) 8.7	
Separated	(3) 5.4	(1) 3.2	(0) 0.0	(2) 34.9	Separated	(44) 3.2	(3) 4.3	
Never Married	(1) 2.2	(1) 3.4	(0) 0.0	(0) 0.0	Never Married	(118) 8.6	(5) 7.2	

TABLE IIA

	Series Incidents								
	Number of Incidents in Series					Single Incident		Multiple Incidents	
	Total	3-4	5-10	11 or more	Community Size				
Community size:(N=56)									
less than 1000	(2) 6.0%	(2) 6.6%	(0) 0.0%	(0) 00%					
1,000 to 4,999	(4) 8.8	(2) 10.1	(0) 0.0	(1) 24.5	Less than 1,000	(207)	15.2%	(9)	13.5%
5,000 to 24,999	(5) 13.0	(2) 9.2	(1) 9.3	(2) 40.7	1,000 to 4,999	(43)	3.2%	(5)	7.5%
25,000 to 49,999	(4) 9.7	(1) 4.6	(1) 9.2	(2) 34.9	5,000 to 24,999	(132)	9.7%	(7)	10.5%
50,000 to 99,999	(10) 21.8	(7) 27.3	(3) 20.2	(0) 0.0	25,000 to 49,999	(98)	7.2%	(7)	10.9%
100,000 to 249,999	(1) 3.0	(0) 0.0	(1) 9.8	(0) 0.0	50,000 to 99,999	(114)	8.4%	(2)	2.6%
250,000 to 499,999	(1) 2.9	(0) 0.0	(1) 9.4	(0) 0.0	100,000 to 249,999	(226)	16.6%	(19)	27.3%
500,000 to 999,999	(7) 14.9	(2) 9.4	(4) 31.1	(0) 0.0	500,000 to 999,999	(203)	14.9%	(10)	14.2%
> 1,000,000	(9) 19.8	(7) 28.7	(1) 11.2	(0) 0.0	1,000,000 or more	(342)	25.0%	(9)	13.5%
					Family Income:				
Family Income: (N=56)									
less than $5,000	(23) 54.1%	(12) 48.2%	(7) 54.4%	(3) 65.1%	Less than $5,000	(622)	51.1%	(34)	54.0%
$5,000 to $9,999	(9) 20.4	(5) 19.1	(2) 17.2	(2) 34.9	5,000 to 9,999	(276)	22.6%	(17)	27.0%
$10,000 to $19,999	(10) 21.6	(8) 28.0	(2) 17.5	(0) 0.0	10,000 to 19,999	(247)	20.3%	(34)	11.1%
$20,000 or more	(3) 5.9	(1) 4.7	(1) 10.9	(0) 0.0	20,000 or more	(73)	6.0%	(5)	7.9%
					Occupation:				
Occupation: (N=56)									
Professional	(3) 11.5%	(2) 10.2%	(1) 20.4%	(0) 0.0%	Professional	(67)	10.2%	(1)	2.6%
Managerial	(4) 21.6	(3) 18.7	(1) 25.8	(0) 0.0	Managerial	(136)	20.6%	(13)	34.2%
Clerical	(2) 7.8	(2) 10.5	(0) 0.0	(0) 0.0	Clerical	(83)	12.6%	(6)	15.8%
Craft, Mechanical	(2) 10.3	(1) 6.7	(1) 27.3	(0) 0.0	Craft, Mechanical	(77)	11.7%	(3)	7.9%
Operative	(2) 9.8	(2) 13.2	(0) 0.0	(0) 0.0	Operative	(124)	18.8%	(5)	13.2%
Farmer	(0) 0.0	(0) 0.0	(0) 0.0	(0) 0.0	Farmer	(18)	2.7%	(1)	2.6%
Service	(11) 42.4	(8) 40.6	(2) 100.0	(2) 100.00	Service	(154)	23.2%	(9)	23.7%
					Education				
Education: (N =56)									
Grade School	(26) 45.4%	(20) 52.8%	(4) 28.2%	(2) 40.7%	Grade School	(616)	45.3%	(29)	43.3%
High School	(21) 37.1	(11) 31.5	(6) 42.8	(3) 59.4	High School	(487)	35.8%	(18)	26.9%
College	(6) 12.1	(3) 10.1	(3) 21.6	(0) 0.0	College	(208)	15.2%	(17)	25.4%
Grad. School	(0) 0.0	(2) 5.6	(1) 7.4	(0) 0.0	Grad. School	(53)	3.7%	(3)	4.5%

TABLE III

Types of Crimes Suffered by Victims of Personal Series

Type of Crime: (N = 56)	Total N	Percentage	Breakdown of Minimum Numbers of Incidents in Series by Crime		
			N=3-4	N=5-10	N=11 or more
Assault					
Serious	(5)	9.8%	2	1	2
Minor	(8)	2.9	7	1	
Attempted	(36)	65.3	24	9	3
Attempted					
Robbery					
Robbery without weapon	(1)	2.3		1	
Attempted robbery	(2)	3.8	2		
Larceny	(3)	5.8	1	2	

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